

Mrs. Houstoun's Travels 1850

*Hesperos : Or, Travels in The West.*

Mrs. Houstoun

Last Moments in England—Embarkation—Gales of Wind—Passengers' Alarm—Arrival at Halifax.

*Steamer at Sea—October.*

I HAVE no doubt when, in the weak moments of our last parting, you exacted from me a promise that from the very moment I lost sight of your 'waterproof' on the Quay of Liverpool, I would commence a 'journal' for your edification, you fancied you were making the most reasonable request in the world. *I*, however, was not blind to the exacting nature of the demand ; nor have I now to take my first lesson in the difficult art of collecting one's thoughts and writing materials, while tossing and tumbling on the wide Atlantic, a thousand miles from land ; and if I *do* succeed in writing a *sea-letter* in a collected form, no one will be more surprised than myself.

Our last day at the Adelphi (last days are, wretched everywhere) is fresh in my recollection ; and I have still before my mental vision the dirty noisy waiters, who *would* persist in asking us if we were 'going across ;' thus doing away with all the *importance* of the enterprise, and confounding the ocean with summer lakes, and river ferries, in a manner most disrespectful to the great Atlantic. Our native shores were certainly not looking their best, as the time for our adieus drew near ; and though, according to the Italian proverb, *Ad ogni ucello suo nido e bello*, I must make an exception to the rule in the case of our *nest* at Liverpool. Impossible to find any poetry or beauty in the cold shining horsehair sofa, or any sentiment in the sulky fire, and the long accumulated dirt and smoke in which the room was shrouded, I am quite certain, that however deep and sincere may be one's regret at parting from one's friends, and however much we may feel at having to say the last 'good night' (or 'good morning,' as the case, may be,) to one's 'native land,' it is always rather a relief when the carriage drives away, and the 'thing,' as I have heard it called, is 'over.' I am sure *we* all found it so, and that even you—who I can see now in my mind's eye standing on the Quay, in the drizzling rain, and with the wet dripping from the points of your umbrella—even you, though you would be loth to confess it, were greatly relieved when you had seen 'the last of us,' and when the rules of conventional friendship no longer obliged you to run the chance of a rheumatic fever, by standing in a Liverpool mist, to watch our departure. But *how* long that departure was delayed, and what alarms, and trepidations, we had to undergo, while (with the fear of being too late before our eyes) we jolted towards the docks, with our feet in the straw of a Liverpool 'fly,' and a heeatomb of portmanteaus above our aching heads, we had not time, during our momentary glimpse of your friendly face, to impart to you. But was it not a miserable morning ? There were no good hearty showers, but the rain came sleepily down, as if it had made up its mind never to stop again, and what with that, and the everlasting smoke, 'the first commercial city in the world' wore an aspect by no means agreeable.

We were late for the steamer—or fancied we were—which, for the moment, was very nearly as bad, so the driver was hurried on, till both himself and his goaded animals were well nigh desperate ; while we, conscious that our passage-money would be forfeited if we allowed the steamer to sail without us, became dead to all feelings of compassion, both for man and beast. On we galloped in a sort of convulsive canter, with an appearance of speed, (for the reality was sadly wanting,) which must have conveyed to the mind of any intelligent spectator, an idea that we were flying from the offended laws of our country. Breathlessly we

dashed upon the quay : ‘ In time for the American steamer ? ’ was our agitated question. ‘ Last boat gone, sir, ’ said an officious-looking man, of course the one present who knew the *least* of the matter. ‘ Mail boat going *directly*, but can’t take no luggage in *her*, ’ said another individual, who seemed equally bent upon our discomfiture. This was a terrible, and, for the moment, a paralyzing blow—after all our trouble, our worry, and our hurry, to be foiled at last ! We looked at each other, and then at our eight trunks, in blank dismay ; and I am not at all sure that visions of returning the way we had come, and of spending the winter in Paris, instead of in its kindred city, New Orleans, did not flit across the disappointed minds of each. A considerable portion of our luggage was already on board, having been sent on before with our man servant, and how we were to rejoin it, was now the difficulty. *Boseton ! ‘ Boseton ! ’ ‘ Allifax ! ’ ‘ Allifax ! ’* screamed the newspaper vendors, adding considerably to the already deafening tumult by their offers of *Times*, *Chronicle*, and *Daily News*, to read on the passage out, and causing one thereby to feel perfectly bewildered, and in a most uncomfortable state of doubt, as to whether the respectable cities above-named were *really* more than two thousand miles off, or only little cockney places within reach of a sixpenny steam-boat.

After sitting for some time in our hackney-coach, in a state bordering upon apathy, watching the falling rain, and wondering what was to happen next, a well-dressed, civil-spoken gentleman, came unexpectedly to our rescue. He did more than pity our dilemma, for he *promised* to do his best to extricate us from it ; and this promise he eventually fulfilled, by contriving that we, with our bags and luggage, should by especial privilege—through him granted—be allowed a passage in the mail-steamer, to the Hibernia. After quitting the questionable comfort of our hackney-coach, we betook ourselves (at the benevolent suggestion of this friendly gentleman) to the still more equivocal shelter of a species of ‘ round-house, ’ built on the quay. It was a large building, open to all the winds of Heaven, and, for that matter to its rains also ; for the October *breeze* whistled through this, its own particular temple, and the wet drifted in everywhere.

A few damp and forlorn people, waiting like ourselves, the arrival of the all-important mailbags, were huddled together, showering abuse on all officials collectively, and carefully abstaining from any invective against *themselves* ; though it was to their own tardiness alone, that they were indebted for being placed in so disagreeable a situation. It was an odious place altogether. There was a pungent odour of bad tobacco, and noxious fumes were steaming up from moist pea-jackets, and drops came heavily down upon one’s shoulders from the closing umbrellas. There was, however, no help for it. To venture back into the town was not to be thought of for a moment, as any attempt to better our condition, was likely to end in the wished for mail-boat escaping us altogether. We waited a long time ; so long, that we began to think the civil-spoken gentleman had voluntarily deceived us, and was, in fact, neither more nor less than some Adelphi emissary in disguise, who had adopted this ingenious method of decoying us back to the hotel. At length, an individual, bolder and more free of speech than the rest, aroused himself to meet the emergency, and, in emphatic language, ‘ up and spoke. ’ To do him only justice, I must say, that what he said was vituperative enough, and his language as *strong* as it could well be. After anathematizing what he, in true ‘ John Bull ’ parlance, called the ‘ humbug of the whole affair, ’ he offered in the most liberal manner in the world, to sacrifice himself to the general good, by rushing recklessly out into the rain to prosecute inquiries, and (as he said) make *the thing* sure. Our gratitude was of course great, but our pugnacious and impatient fellow-sufferer might have spared himself the trouble he was taking ; for no sooner was he gone than we received the joyful intelligence that the mailbags had at length arrived, and, with them, the time for us to embark.

Though (at the moment of bidding it ‘ Farewell, ’) we could not help our thoughts dwelling a *little* on the land we were leaving behind us, it was a joyful sight, that of the dirty little

steamer lying alongside the quay, making her notes of departure audible enough, by slight puffs from her black chimney, and with her deck already crowded with bags and passengers. On we hurried with the rest, the ladies tucking up their gowns in a vain effort to keep them out of the mire, and the gentlemen shouldering their umbrellas, and jostling one another violently. There lay the heaps of huge white leather sacks, some on deck and some still on the quay, but all guarded alike by the admiralty-agent, who stood over them watching their embarkation, and with as great an air of dignified responsibility on his countenance as government functionaries always think it necessary to assume, whether they are intrusted with a *portfolio*, or have only a letter-bag for which they are accounted responsible. The trust, however, over which the mail-agent was mounting guard, was a very respectable-looking one after all, and I could not help thinking that the bags appeared large and numerous enough, to contain a letter from every full-grown inhabitant of the three kingdoms, to say nothing of those numerous correspondents of America in the continent of Europe, who pay our little island the compliment of sending their dispatches ‘ via Liverpool.’ I have a vague idea that the English government pays eighty thousand pounds a-year to have these precious bags conveyed across the water, and, if this be the case, they have a good right to be treated with courtesy and respect ; certainly there was no want of either on the part of the lieutenant who guarded them, and who, in his naval uniform, looked a most important little personage. He was possessed of but one available eye, which however he never raised ‘ from the *bags* before him,’ and as to ‘ idly gazing,’ the business on hand was far too serious for that

We all went below to escape the noise, and above all, the rain : and even the government *bag-man*—after seeing his charge in safety—joined the company below. He was not communicative—*great* officials seldom are—and for some time, not a word was uttered. It was to the weather at last, that mighty source of English colloquial intercourse, that we were indebted for a commencement of conversation. A shy-looking passenger, who seemed to consider the lieutenant as a sort of walking ‘ Murphy,’ or speaking barometer at the least, ventured to ask him what he thought of the weather, and of our chance of having a ‘ good run.’ What a look of contempt the little man gave him ! ‘ Sir,’ he replied, ‘ how can I, or any man living, answer for the weather in the month of October ?’ This was true enough, and if he had extended his indignant denial of such responsibility to all the other months of the year, no one would have been surprised. Before the dirty little steamer left the quay, its gloomy cabin, where we could barely stand upright, was brightened by the light of one kind and friendly face. The face of one who had come many a mile to see us ‘ off,’ and who was only indebted for that melancholy pleasure, to the delay in our embarkation, which had made us all so angry.

A quarter of an hour brought us to the Hibernia, and saw us, one after another, mounting the ladder at the side of the ship. All this *you* saw also, but what you did *not* see, and what I should in vain attempt to describe, was the great and alarming selfishness, which, after we were all on board, broke out all over the vessel. Each had an eye, and a very keen one, too, to his or her particular comfort and gratification, and great was the noise, and mighty the confusion caused by the clashing of these rival interests. There were such incessant calls for the stewards, and such unremitting demands upon the time and attention of the stewardess, that it was quite wonderful how the poor people contrived to keep either their senses or their tempers. I remembered Dickens’s touching appeal to public sympathy on the score of his sudden introduction to the narrow shelf and the unhappy etceteras of his Atlantic berth ; and, if it had not been for his graphic description, I should have pictured to myself brighter things, and been wofully disappointed by the stern reality. As it was, I really did feel in a ludicrous state of bewilderment, and sat down musingly upon my carpet-bag, wondering how existence could be endured in such a place. We were indeed ‘ cabined, cribbed, confined.’ There was a little corner washing-stand, with a little glass-door above it, behind which stood a lamp, destined to be extinguished by the bedroom steward, when, at ten o’clock at night, he went

his rounds with curfew-like regularity. But the grand difficulty was how to dispose of the indispensable carpet-bags and dressing-cases, so as to admit of a reasonable hope that the door might be opened sufficiently to admit of egress. This seemed, on first sight, an utter impossibility ; but by dint of coaxing the bags into flatness and turning dressing-cases on their sides, we at length succeeded in obtaining something like order. The door itself was a standing misfortune, for it had an inveterate propensity to opening, and falling violently back on the slightest provocation, swinging and banging against everything within reach, to the utter extinction of all comfort or repose. By dinner-time we were all hustled into our respective places, the two long tables in the saloon being completely filled by the hundred passengers on board. At the head of one table presided the captain, while the little lieutenant, who had by that time (the mail-bags being in safety, and his mind comparatively at rest) subsided into a pleasant, good-natured individual, did the honours of the other.

The passengers were principally merchants returning to New Orleans for the business-season ; they were most of them English, with a sprinkling of Americans, and a few Germans. Of the ladies, one was very pretty, but she took to her bed almost immediately, and the upper-deck saw her no more till we reached Boston. Another, with at least equal pretensions to good looks, was undergoing a course of snubbing from her husband—an Englishman, *ça va sans dire*, for no other husbands in the world have the bad taste to *afficher* their domestic tragedies in public—and generally left the table, when the meal was half over, in floods of tears. Poor little woman ! Every one pities her, and I often wonder whether she will become accustomed to it, or sink under the infliction. This ill-matched pair are going to *settle* in Canada, the situation in life of all others where congeniality of soul and a happy temperament are most needed.

In all, there might be about a dozen ladies grouped round the heads of either table, drinking champagne to the success of the voyage, and looking very cheerful. The first day went off quietly, for the wind had fallen, and everything was still and snug. The next day was Sunday. The weather was lovely, and after prayers, (which were read by a clergyman on board,) every one went on the hurricane deck. I never saw anything in nature look so vividly green as the Irish coast, close to which we were passing ; bright as the ‘ first gem of the *say*’ ought to be, her verdant hills stood out in bold relief against the clear autumn sky, and made us dearly love the last look of the land we were leaving.

On we sped, and during that first and last, and only calm day, every one ate and drank and enjoyed themselves. Breakfast at eight, not the usual miserable steamboat fare, horrid tea, limp toast, stale bread and salt butter, but broiled fowls, kidneys, beefsteaks, cold ham, dried herrings, and eggs in profusion. Every two hours throughout the day, was the business of eating renewed, in some shape or other, and scarcely were the remains of one meal cleared away, when the stewards again entered in a body, laden with piles of plates, which they dashed into their respective places with a force and velocity which never failed to excite my wonder and admiration.

Monday the 4th of October, was ushered in with foul high wind, which blew till the sea was gradually lashed to mountain height, and the ship rocked, and rose, and plunged, causing all the ladies, with but *one* exception, to quit the scene of action, and to bury themselves and their apprehensions in the solitudes of their respective berths. Sad, and weary to *them*, must have been the days of our watery pilgrimage ! But there was no dulness or tedium for those in health. Up, and on deck at seven, time enough often to see the sun

Brought forth in purple, cradled in vermilion,  
Baptized in molten gold, and swathed in dun ;

And to remain all day and half the night in the saloon, watching the ever-changing sea, and amused at the strange variety of human life on board. Some played at chess, and others whist, for hours together, and all in perfect silence, wrapped up in their game, though often obliged to hold on with all their might to their seats, when the lurches of the ship rendered them anything but secure. The Americans kept up their national character for *liquoring*, and were, I must say, by far the most cheerful portion of the society. Their ‘ custom of an afternoon,’ was to prepare and drink a favourite compound, which went by the name of ‘ brandy-cocktail.’ The avowed object was to stimulate their appetites for dinner, (though for this there appeared no absolute necessity,) and as it seemed to have the desired effect, I may as well add, for the benefit of other *weak* and *delicate* individuals, that brandy-cocktail is composed of equal quantities of ‘ Stoughton bitters’ and Cognac. Under the benign influence of this pleasant compound, the Americans on board, though often somewhat noisy, were never offensively so, and when subjected to unavoidable sea-going annoyances, such as receiving the contents of their soup plates in their laps, or the candles against their noses, they only laughed the more, while some of our military countrymen looked on and frowned, in all the double distilled dulness of English exclusiveness.

The cheerful Americans, meanwhile, were nowise affected by their solemnity, and seemed perfectly contented to have all the fun and all the ‘ cocktail’ to themselves.

The nights, I confess, were extremely tedious. It was what is called a *badish* passage, with dead lights almost always in, and head winds ; while seas, heavy ones too, falling on the deck, and an incessant and tremendous noise—the mingled roaring of winds and waves, effectually drove away sleep. One of the paddles was almost always taking its ease out of the water, leaving the other to do all the work, which did not hasten our movements, and helped to cause the disappointment in the reckoning which always awaited us at noon. I shall not attempt to describe what little I saw of the *public* discomfort below. It was what it must always be, when close quarters, irritability, foolish fears, sickness, and hysterics combine together for the general misfortune of the society assembled. But there was one stout, heavy, dark-eyed lady, (she was, I fancy, a West Indian, and had boasted high things of herself before the great leveller, sea-sickness, laid her low,) whose terrors took the strangest and most burlesque form it is possible to conceive. Among her sundry possessions was an unfortunate son of some eight years old, who shared her narrow cot, and was the unwilling victim of her fears. Her nights were usually spent in rushing desperately about the various passages, dragging along her sleepy and half-dressed child, and imploring aid and information from all she met with. On one occasion, after one of these nocturnal rambles, she returned to the ladies’ cabin, where I happened to be, and fell breathless on the sofa, moaning piteously. It was two o’clock in the morning, and, to use a sailor’s expression, ‘ blowing great guns ;’ a bitter wind came whistling and roaring down the companion, while the only *human* sound which reached our ears, was the voice of the captain, every now and then giving orders amidst the clamour. The poor shivering exotic, who, in the shape of a white-faced, black-eyed boy, stood stupidly amongst us, would in all probability have slept the careless heavy sleep of childhood throughout the storm ; but this the anxious heart of the mother forbade. She protested that nothing should separate her from her darling, and that he should sink into his watery grave in her arms ! So we wrapped the wretched child in a blanket, in anticipation of this melancholy event, while his loving parent reiterated her frantic cries for the captain, and her insane assurances that *the boats were being lowered*, and that, whatever happened, *she* should claim a comfortable place in the safest among them. The stewardess, who was a perfect pattern of a cheerful, courageous little woman, had enough to do to pacify the fears and modify the screams which (as the gale increased) came thick and fast from the lips of some of the ladies in her charge ; but at last, finding all her efforts unsuccessful, she sent a message to the captain to the effect that, as *she* “ could do nothing” with some of the ladies,

she begged he would come below for a moment. And down he came, and if he had actually possessed the power of stilling the waves, he could scarcely have received a warmer welcome. In the twinkling of an eye he was surrounded by female forms, heedless of curl-papers, and utterly regardless of the unbecomingness of a nightcap. ‘ Oh, captain,’ was the universal query, ‘ is there any fear ?’ ‘ Plenty !’ said the good-natured man, borrowing a standard joke for the occasion—‘ plenty, but not the slightest danger, I assure you.’ ‘ But, captain,’ persevered the stout lady, ‘ I know I heard them lowering the boats.’ The captain laughed so cheerfully at the extraordinary idea of lowering boats a thousand miles from land, in the midst of a *whole* gale of wind, that he put them all in spirits. Captains of packet ships always *do* contrive to look so cheerful : why, I cannot imagine, for their life is a very trying and laborious one while at sea, and the responsibility ‘ on their shoulders,’ heavy and unceasing. After this, it was natural to suppose that there would have been, at least, an interval of peace ; but, *la langue des femines est leur epée, et elles ne la laissent pas rouiller*, and, as the Creole lady was *en train*, she commenced, with all the vehemence of her sex and country, a string of abuse against each and all of her particular friends and advisers in England, for having recommended her to go to sea in such weather ; and added, viciously enough, that she only wished they could hear what she said of them.

A great deal of what passed in that memorable voyage has escaped my memory ; but not the behaviour of the emissary of the Corn-League, whose nerves were in a sadly shattered and feminine state. Often did I hear him wander up to the deck in the dead of the night, impelled by the restlessness of fear and the desire of companionship ; once even I heard him ask, as well as the chattering of his teeth would permit, whether ‘ any one had been down lately, to see if there was much water in the hold ?’ I have often observed that sailors rarely tolerate either questions or interference from a landsman, and never from a frightened one, when he accosts him in moments of difficulty. So the officer of the watch answered, as I had anticipated, very shortly, ‘ Sir, what the d—— have you to do with the water in the hold ? The deuce is in it if you haven’t enough here, without going out of your way to look for more.’ There was a good deal more than enough where they stood, and in the saloon too, for the *scuppers* were not sufficiently large to allow free escape for the seas that broke over us. The poor Corn-Law man wandered back to his unfortunate wife, and soothed *her* hysterical alarms as best he could. *She* did literally nothing but scream, by night as well as by day ; and the ship doctor had enough to do between her and two ladies in highly interesting situations, in whom the alarm they experienced threatened to produce very serious consequences. [1] For their sakes, as well as my own, I often found myself echoing the Irishman’s wish, that, ‘ If Britannia did rule the waves, he only wished, for his part, that she’d just be so kind as to rule ’em straight, anyhow !’

It is a curious and an interesting sight that of an engine working its way along in the midst of a storm. To go below and watch the quiet regularity of its movements, and feel with every rise and fall of the huge piston a greater sense of security was a favourite *recreation* of many on board, myself among the number. And yet, while admiring the *composure* of the mighty machine, which, in the midst of the awful war of the elements, still keeps on its never-ending, slow, and steady motion, it is fearful to think how slight a thing would set all this wonderful machinery wrong, and throw all into confusion and danger. To an inexperienced eye, it all seems so complicated, and so amazingly difficult to manage, that I always contemplated it with mingled feelings of admiration and fear.

There was a sort of Sam Slick on board, who held forth on steam-power to a wonderful extent. He had generally round him a knot of eager listeners, attracted by their love of the marvellous, and the Athenian-like thirst after “ some new thing.” He lectured on many ingenious inventions of his own, particularly on one which he affirmed would enable man-

kind to cross the Atlantic in seven days. His name I forget, but I have no doubt it has since become famous in the great and mighty world of steam. He was one of a class of men often met with in the Northern States—shrewd, calculating, far-seeing, and unscrupulous ; in short, a genuine *Yankee* from top to toe. Play on board, though constantly resorted to, was neither a source of discord nor a cause of ill-breeding. The *Southerners* played high, often having as much as a thousand dollars (£200) on a rubber ; but it was, apparently, only *pour passer le temps*, and not carried on as an *Industrie*.

Our vessel gradually becoming lighter, owing to the consumption of food and coal, we increased in speed as we neared Halifax ; which we found ourselves doing thirteen days after leaving Liverpool. No one rejoiced more at the prospect of seeing land than “ the dark lady.” The last night before we reached the longed-for port had been the most suffering of all to this ill-fated female, for on that occasion she had so far lost sight of the proprieties of life, as to lay violent hands on the bed-room steward, (alias the *boots*,) and to insist upon his remaining in her berth to assist her by his comforting presence through the horrors of the night ; he, however, pleaded stress of business, and escaped the office. But joy beyond expression, Halifax is gained at last ! I hail the welcome, though ugly, sight of its shabby houses, and hasten to close my long letter, and to promise you that the next shall be, if not *more* interesting, at least not half so long.

Impressions of Halifax—Indian Summer—Pretty Quadroon—Arrival at Boston.

*Boston—October.*

I MUST give you as clear an account as I can of our wandering, since I despatched my letter to you from the Hibernia. I hailed the land of the ‘ blue noses ’ with proper enthusiasm ; and though the houses were wooden and rickety, the streets dirty, and the general aspect of the place poverty-stricken, it was with unfeigned joy that I pressed my feet on the solid earth once more, and heard the tread of horses, and the sound of passing wheels. Three hours only were allowed us on shore, and I believe almost every one on board took advantage of this limited allowance, and strolled about the town, or into the oyster-shops. I soon found that three hours were enough, and almost more than enough for all there was to see ; for when we landed the sun had set, and the streets were ill-lighted with oil and frightfully dirty. There was no pavement, except that of the slippery trottoir, which, like the houses, was of wood, and equally irregular and *uncomfortable*. The want of energy, perseverance, and intelligence visible in so many of our colonies is nowhere more remarkable than at Halifax. You see it in the wretched aspect of the shops, the poorness of the merchandize, the absence of public carriages, and in the general appearance of indolence apparent in all you meet. Certainly civilization and refinement have made little progress among the blue noses, if I may judge from the *much* that I heard of their deficiencies, and from the *little* that I saw of the place. We returned to the steamer in good time, for our close shave at Liverpool had taught us a lesson of caution. To our surprise, we found that the captain had not yet come on board, but *enrevanche*, a few *choice spirits* were tossing down brimming tumblers of champagne, and drinking their own health, and that of their friends, in the most jovial manner possible. In short, not a few were gloriously drunk, and, for the time at least, uproariously happy. Everything on board ship seems to afford an excuse for pouring forth libations of some sort or other. On this occasion, these worthies had been enjoying the luxury of eating oysters by hundreds, and had returned to the ship to boast of their achievements, and make, as they said, a night of it. There was a good deal of delay in getting in the coal, but when it was all on board, the arrival of the captain shortened the amusements of the noisy ones, who very soon grew tolerably quiet.

On we sped through the formidable bay of Fundy, of which we had heard such awful things, that we dreaded a repetition of our former scenes ; but in this we were agreeably deceived, for the wind seemed to have blown itself out, tired, perhaps, of making no impression on our stout-built ship. As we left Halifax far behind us, and advanced towards Boston, cold came the breeze from the ' new country,' and colder grew our anticipations as we thought on the still more northern clime to which our steps were bound; and even Niagara rose up before us as a most bleak and dreary prospect. Still, though cold, the weather was fine, clear, dry, and bracing. We were experiencing what some of our fellow-passengers called the Indian summer, and were told for our comfort that this sort of weather generally lasted through October and part of November.

After we left Halifax, I became greatly interested in one of our companions, who, having remained, during all the early part of the voyage, closely confined to her state-room, made her appearance on deck shortly before her arrival at that place. She was very young and beautiful. Her dress was in the best possible taste, with Parisian grace lurking in every fold of her garments. Her hair, which was rich and luxuriant, was of a golden brown and dressed in the simplest style, but glossy and neat as that of one of Sterne's ' grisettes.' There was a look almost of high breeding in her small hands, and her manner was *French* and graceful in the extreme. This fair creature entered the saloon alone, and alone she remained, for lovely as she was, no one addressed her ; but on the contrary, she appeared to be purposely avoided by every one present. Even the commonest acts of civility were, in her case, neglected, and that by the very men who were generally foremost in paying *banal* attentions to the ladies who honoured the saloon by their presence. Seeing her in this deserted situation, I entered into conversation with her, and found her charming. French was evidently her native tongue, and she spoke no other ; there was just enough of shyness in her manner to increase its fascination, without giving it a tinge of awkwardness, and with her vivid blush, her evident gratitude for any attention paid her, and her little playful confidences about the Parisian convent she had just left, I thought her one of the most loveable creatures I had ever seen. It will be asked by the uninitiated, and, among the rest, by you—why this fair being was set apart in the way I have described, and why she was like a *tabooed* creature, or rather a Pariah from which men and women seemed to shrink as from an unholy thing. Dear——, it was this. Within the veins of this fair and delicate girl ran a few drops of that dark blood, which is supposed by many—I fear, indeed, by most in America—to place the individual cursed by so *hideous* an accident without the pale of social existence. It mattered not that this poor girl was fair in form and gentle and kind in nature—her mother was a Quadroon ! What was it to *them* that she was accomplished, and elegant in act or thought; she had what is called coloured blood in her veins, and she was proscribed ! And how little, how very little, was she herself aware of the many and deep mortifications that awaited her ! Her convent friends had never reproached her for the circumstances of her birth, nor had the light and warm-hearted French girls thought less highly of the pretty Louisianian because her mother was a slave, and *she* one of a despised and miserable race. In the simplicity of her heart, she longed to reach her journey's end, to see again the mother from whom during eleven years she had been separated, and the young brothers who had been her companions in infancy. I knew how different from the future which her sanguine fancy painted, would be the stern reality, and I felt beforehand the sincerest commiseration for her lot.

She mused alone ! Nor did she question why  
No friends came near her to console or cheer ;  
Alone she check'd the ever-rising sigh,  
Alone she shed the agonizing tear.

Once she was blest : the spring-time of her life  
Was then as cloudless as a summer's day ;  
Unfit to battle in the tempest's strife,  
Love flung its radiance o'er her gladsome way.

Poor nameless girl ! Those joyous hours have fled ;  
Gay flowers no more thy weary path adorn ;  
Thou stand'st amongst thy garlands crush'd and dead,  
Thy heart well nigh as withered and forlorn.

Thy gentle head in meek affliction bend ;  
Glean, if thou canst, from solitude relief;  
At least 'tis something, though without a friend,  
That none can mock the lonely slave-girl's grief.

Poor victim of an erring nation's curse,  
Is there no pitying heart to mourn thy woes,  
To feel that life can show few sorrows worse  
Than those that wait thee ere thine own shall close.

Bereft of all that makes existence dear,  
Thy smiles the wealthy and the gay may buy ;  
Thy hidden griefs thy sole possession here,  
The only hope that's left thee is to die !

It does, certainly, seem a subject for wonder (the laws at present in force in regard to the slave population being such as to render such mortifications the natural consequence of a foreign and *liberal* education) that parents can be found injudicious enough to send their daughters to pass their childhood and early youth in Europe, where the difference in habits, and in the laws of social intercourse, so ill prepare them for what their existence must inevitably be on their return to their own country. How much better would it be were they to be accustomed from their early childhood to the evils of their moral and social condition ; and how infinitely is it to be desired that in addition to their dangerous gift of beauty, they should not be instructed in the many graces and accomplishments which a Parisian education is calculated to bestow ! I do not enlarge upon the peculiar *tastes* which such a *course of study* is liable to produce, though they are, perhaps, often productive of the greatest evils to the hapless possessor. But I cannot now dwell on this subject, though it is one which (even in persons usually unthinking) must call forth any kindly sympathies they may possess, and which to you is, as I am well aware, one of peculiar interest and moment.

Boston is in sight, and I shall, therefore, close my letter, and send you another when I have seen a little of the country and its *natives*.

Boston—Well-Arranged Custom-House—Invitation to A New England Country-House—  
Slow Train—Newbury Port—Temperance Ordinary—Arrival at ' Indian Hill.'

*Boston—October.*

My last letter closed with an announcement of my first glimpse of Boston, when (for the last time, as I fondly hoped) I ascended the slippery *leaden ladder*, and hastened up to the hurricane deck. Whether it was that the sun was shining more brightly than I had seen it do for weeks, or that I looked upon Boston as the happy means of bringing our weary voyage to a conclusion, and was, therefore, inclined to look upon it with favourable eyes, I cannot say ; but the effect of its first appearance was to us, at least, very pleasing. Numerous small islands

are studded over the bay, and though they are bleak and barren, and many of them only fit to afford a resting-place to ‘ the weary bird blown o’er the deep,’ yet they give variety, if not ‘ enchantment, to the view.’

Boston is built on a conical-shaped hill, the summit of which is crowned by the state house, with its lofty cupola, the hill itself being covered with houses of an uniform white hue. On the right may be observed the obelisk at Charlestown, while in the foreground are seen the tall masts of the shipping, and from which hung pendant the colours of every nation, and through the intricacies of which *our* gallant vessel was soon to thread her way. While occupied with making these observations, I perceived that we were steaming slowly through a narrow channel, on either side of which forts were erected, one of which goes by the name of Fort Independence, while the other is (I think) called Fort Warren. The Americans on board, who were assembled together on the hurricane deck, looked on with no little pride and exultation on the imposing appearance of their great maritime city. On every hand, one heard loud boasts of the perfect security of the harbour, and unqualified assertions as to the utter impossibility of the ‘ Britishers’ ever being able to make good an entry into its fastnesses. A war between the two nations is at this time so very probable an event, the Oregon dispute being at its height, that I was the less surprised at the belligerent ideas which seemed uppermost in every breast. I confess, that when I saw the extreme narrowness of the channel which formed the entrance to the harbour, and glanced at the forts on either side, I began to have some slight misgivings myself as to our chance of being able to take possession of the city if it should be considered necessary to do so. A cheerful smile, however, which I observed on the countenance of an English engineer officer, reassured me. ‘ There would not be much difficulty in keeping us *out*,’ said he ; ‘ two or three old vessels loaded with stones, and sunk just about where we are now, would effectually prevent all ingress into Boston by sea.’ It was cheering to think how easily their best harbour might be rendered useless to our enemies, in case of war. The same thing might be affirmed of, I believe, almost all the American ports.

But the loud notes of departure were now beginning ; already the saloon was emptied of its guests, and the long shining tables looked like those of ‘ some banquet-hall deserted.’ As the vessel came slowly to an anchor, every one seemed not only *ready* to depart, but in the greatest possible hurry to rush on shore. And who could wonder at their anxiety and eagerness, suffering, as most of them had done, with such intensity for fourteen days and a half ! The deck was crowded with trunks, packing-cases, and carpet-bags, awaiting, each in its turn, the usually unceremonious ransacking of the custom-house officers. We fancied that, it being Sunday, there would be some delay in the passing of our baggage ; but no such thing occurred, and to us, accustomed to European delays, incivilities, and extortion, it was quite astonishing to see the celerity with which the baggage of more than a hundred passengers was disposed of. There was neither wrangling nor complaints, nor, as far as we could see, bribery or corruption. The fact was, that very few trunks were opened at all, whether from absence of suspicion or lack of time I cannot say, but so it was.

As far as we ourselves were concerned, we did not remain a day or even an hour at Boston after our disembarkation ; for we were immediately hurried off by a *friend of a friend*, a sort of collateral acquaintance, not personally known to us before, to his residence, some thirty miles from the city. We were by no means sorry to have an opportunity of seeing the interior of a New-England habitation, and also of obtaining a glimpse of some portion, at least, of the state of Massachusetts. Added to this, it being Sunday, there was literally nothing to be seen or done at Boston, and we were too much pressed for time, owing to the lateness of the season, to fritter any of it away in useless delays. Our host to *be* was a keen intelligent Yankee, a good deal in the *Sam Slick* style, with a heart full of hospitality, and a face redolent of fun and humour. He had a fund of anecdote which appeared perfectly inexhaustible, and was

himself frequently the hero of some of the most wondrous escapes and adventures which ever occurred to mortal man—to string together.

Having described our new companion to the best of my ability, I must now beg you to follow us (in your lively imagination) into our hackney-coach. Behold us, then, in a huge old-fashioned-looking machine, capable of containing nine persons, trundling quietly along, and making our way over a long, narrow, wooden bridge to the *dee-pot*, as the railway stations are everywhere called ! Arrived there, we found the ‘ cars ’ on the point of starting, and passengers taking their tickets and places as fast as they conveniently could. We did the same, and were soon installed in what, at first sight, appeared to be an overgrown omnibus, thickly studded with windows on either side. Our entry was made by climbing up through a door behind, and when seated, we had full leisure to look about us. There might be assembled in this human menagerie about sixty people, *gentlemen* and *ladies* of all descriptions and conditions, (for the distinctions of first and second class carriages are unknown here ;) and one and all were arranged on small horsehair seats, with wooden backs, each capable of containing two very small people, and no more. These seats were placed, to use a nautical expression, *athwart ships*, instead of *fore* and *aft*, and every two people turned their backs on the two behind, and so on to the end of the carriage. Through the middle (for the seats extend along each of the bare wooden walls of the caravan) is a narrow pathway, through which every newcomer walks to his seat, by this means (and it is no trifling advantage) avoiding the foot-treading, gown-crushing, and begging-pardon process, to which, under different arrangements, unfortunate travellers are exposed. At the *door end* of the carriage a small placard was pasted on to the woodwork, and on it was a notice to the following effect—‘ Gentlemen are requested neither to smoke or spit in the carriages.’ Below this was a piece of advice, still more characteristic of the habits and manners of the country—‘ Gentlemen are likewise recommended not to hang their legs or heads out of the windows while the cars are in motion.’ We did not travel fast—indeed, we were rather disappointed at the little locomotive progress made by a people who boast *that, if they were going to ride on a flash of lightning, they would delay their departure in order to put their spurs on* ; nor can I think that I do the railroads injustice when I say that we never achieved more than twenty miles in the hour ; but to make amends for the slowness of our progress, the noise was terrific. This is owing, I fancy, partly to the foundation of the road being of stone, and partly to the great number and the ill-fitting of the windows, which kept up an incessant rattling, and effectually prevented our hearing any of the good stories of our Yankee friend, who, however, persevered in telling them in despite of all difficulties,

On a first introduction to American railroad travelling, it is impossible not to be struck with the extreme deficiency in state and circumstance, visible in the whole arrangement of the affairs. In England a railroad is really somewhat imposing, with its liveried attendants, its stone-built stations, and its bells and whistles. In America there is nothing of the kind,—a little feeble *tinkling* warns you to take your seat ; and, instead of a well-fed, authoritative-looking official opening the door with a bang, and calling imperatively for tickets, a spare New-Englander, with lank red hair, and clothed in a blanket coat, walks perpetually up and down the carriage, talking occasionally to its occupants, and stopping every now and then to ask for a ticket, if he does not chance to see it (an omission which is extremely rare) inserted into the band of the passenger’s hat.

Notwithstanding the placard which so kindly warned us of the chance of breaking our heads, if we obtruded them through the windows, I found it quite impossible to retain *mine* within the carriage. There was, in the centre of the carriage, a stove, heated with anthracite coal ; and what with that and the evident and general dislike to fresh air and water, and the universally prevalent custom of stuffing green apples (one of the staple commodities of the

country) into the pockets of coats and petticoats, an atmosphere was created which only those who have been in a similar situation have any chance of imagining.

Newbury Port, to which we were to travel by the cars, is a considerable town, about thirty-six miles from Boston. It was a dreary country through which we passed, and the land poor and stony, though in many places highly cultivated. In the neighbourhood of Boston are extensive salt marshes, the presence of which, it must be allowed, does not in any part of the world tend to give an agreeable impression of the place which they surround ; the trees are also few in number, and stunted in growth, and are for the most part firs of various kinds. The suburban houses are numerous, and are, many of them, large imposing looking villas, though built chiefly of wood ; by far the greater proportion, however, are small cockney affairs, pert and white, and adorned with green jalousies—in short, *des veritables maisons de perruquiers*.

As we advanced, the scenery did not improve ; nothing could be less picturesque than the straggling settler's fence, or more desolate looking than the blackened stumps of the burned down trees, in the newly cleared lands. To *grub* up these stumps is one of the severest labours of the settler, one, also, which he is very apt to neglect, leaving to time and nature the task of reducing the offending objects to a level with the soil. Large granite blocks are often to be seen rearing their heads among the scanty vegetation, and recalling to one's mind the fact that, however much the industry and untiring perseverance of man has done towards improving and cultivating the soil of New England, nature has dealt forth *her* favours with a niggardly hand. Take it as a hunting country, it would be unrivalled—immense grass fields, moderate fences, and generally level ground, form a good *ensemble* of advantages. We were told, too, that *the* great desideratum was not wanting, the foxes being in considerable numbers. They are, however, so large and strong that none of the dogs of the country have any chance with them. The farmers wage fierce war against these troublesome and predatory creatures, and they are shot in great numbers for the sake of their skins, which are here worth two dollars apiece.

Newbury Port is a remarkably clean, pretty-looking town. The houses are all freshly white-washed, and the green Venetian blinds, which, owing to the heat of the sun, were all closed, gave *them* a very bright and *riant* appearance. The town itself looked, however, as if actually deserted by its inhabitants. The ' Great Plague' might have been there, and buried every human being in one common grave, for any vestige of existence which greeted us in our walk from the *dee-pot* to the inn. Not a human being was to be seen in the wide streets, neither were there any horses or dogs, or even the face of a Christian peeping through the window-blinds to look at the strangers. It was true it was Sunday, and Sunday is kept with great decorum and solemnity in New England, and, moreover, we had arrived during the period when divine service was being performed ; but even this circumstance seemed scarcely sufficient to account for the appalling stillness which reigned over the place.

After walking for about a quarter of an hour through this *peopled* solitude, (for we concluded, perhaps rather rashly, that there must be humans, as the Americans call them, inside the houses,) we arrived at the *hoe-tel*. It was a large, shambling, red brick building, and could boast of a time worn look, which in this country is a rare sight. The sign which swung before it, high in air, was a very amusing one ; it represented a sober, middle-aged gentleman, invested with a three-cornered hat, an English general officer's uniform, and a great look of English dignity and contempt for the rest of the world. The costume was that of the last century, and excited my curiosity so much, that I insisted on a close examination of the antiquarian treasure. With no inconsiderable difficulty I contrived to discover some nearly effaced characters, purporting that the military hero was no less a man than General Wolf himself ! After making out ' this transient mention of a dubious name,' I raised my eyes a

little higher, and lo ! above the warrior's head I saw inscribed in large letters, ' Merrimac Hôtel.' I confess that I was greatly relieved at not rinding the name of some blustering Yankee appended to any portrait—however rough and unsightly—of one of our greatest heroes.

On entering, we found the interior arrangements no less eccentric than the outside. Unlike any other place of the kind I had ever been in, a silence as of the grave pervaded every part of the house. I was shown by an apparently speechless woman into a large, square, venerable - looking room, through which the hot sun glared fiercely, and the accumulated dust of years came out to sport in its beams. The air was redolent of stale and pent-up tobacco smoke, and the domestic flies were thronging the windows, and indeed all parts of the room in such prodigious quantities, and hummed and buzzed so noisily in the dust and sun, that I soon found their companionship unbearable, and went out to reconnoitre. After some time, having lost my way more than once in intricate and most mysterious passages, I was fortunate enough to ' chance upon' a *help*. Not that I was either much happier or wiser than before, after my short conference with the dignified damsel I accosted, for when (knowing the impossibility of procuring a private meal) I asked her when ' ordinary' dinner would be ready, she replied with, ' Right away, I expect.' I was as much in the dark as if she had answered my question in Hebrew. After making this oracular reply, the ' young lady' dis- appeared, and I was left with no other resource but to return once more to my flies,—verily their name was Legion. Had I known at that time that ' right away,' in the new and improved (?) version of our language which is current in America, signifies ' directly,' I should not have been without some hopes of being speedily summoned from my retreat ; it would appear, however, that in this case my informant had spoken unadvisedly, for another half-hour went by before the welcome, though stunning sound of the gong was heard.

But how shall I describe that dinner !—how bring before you the wonders of that silent banquet ; or how picture to you the entrance of the guests, who, one after another, dropped quietly into their places, with a gravity and decorum I never saw equalled ; or the food itself, which even to a hungry woman, (and I *was* hungry,) was almost too fat and coarse to swallow ! Not a word was spoken during the repast, and as silence is infectious, so we also naturally attuned our voices to whispers, and at last refrained from speaking altogether. The dinner consisted of very fat boiled pork, surrounded by, and adorned with Haricot beans, as infallible a Sunday dish in *New England*, as roast beef is in *Old ditto*. There was beef, but it was greasy ; and poultry, but it was tough ; and the afterpiece was a pleasant wind up, in the shape of an enormous pudding, composed of Indian corn and molasses. *Squash* made its appearance in various forms ; and altogether, though the food was not *recherché*, there was plenty and to spare. An attenuated, pale-faced young lady, who appeared to think, that wait-ing upon us at all was a great act of condescension on her part, walked slowly round the table at stated intervals, with a water-jug in her hand, from which she replenished the goblets of the guests. No one drank either wine or spirits, though some ventured to commit the excess of washing down their platefuls of fat pork, with brimming glasses of milk ! I longed greatly for a glass of wine and water after the fatigues of the journey, but I felt it would never do, to take such a *strong measure* in this—the head quarters of the Temperance Society. The meal, plentiful as it was, and ample as was the justice done to its varied merits, did not take long in the discussion. No one paid his neighbour the compliment of waiting for him, but no sooner had a *gentleman* or *lady* ' had enough,' than he or she got up without any ceremony, and left the room. This was my first initiation into the mysteries of an American table-d'hôte, and very original I thought it, I can assure you.

' Well, sir, I've chartered a carriage,' shouted out, at last, the loud cheerful voice of our friend, as he stood at the hotel door—' I've chartered a carriage, to take us all on to Indian Hill, bag and baggage.' And there in fact *was* the carriage ; a heavy lumbering thing, but

drawn by two little active wiry horses, who, as we soon found, could take us along at a very fair pace. Up little hills, and down equally diminutive dales, we ambled along for rather more than an hour. The scenery improved in beauty and variety as we progressed ; the granite blocks were larger and more frequent, and the trees were higher, and of thicker growth. I began even to have some faint idea of the extreme beauty of an American forest in the autumn. I saw the rich crimson of the maple, and the bright golden tints of the hickory, mingled with the browns and lingering greens of the other children of the forest, and the brilliant sunset glowing over all :

Earth and sky one blaze of glory.

The country seemed to be very thickly populated ; and, moreover, there was not a poor-looking house to be seen ; all was prosperous and comfortable-looking. What a change from those early days, when the pilgrim fathers of old first ‘ moored their bark on the wild New England shore !’ Still, even as then, do the ‘ breaking waves dash high,’ and the ‘ rocking pines of the forest roar’ to the accompaniment of the wild Atlantic gales : yet almost everything else has changed. Roads intersect the country in every direction, railway smoke shoots up among the thinned forests, and the hand of man is everywhere ! The ancestor of our new friend was one of those bold and independent spirits, who, two centuries before, had come over in the gallant ‘ Mayflower’ to seek in this distant land ‘ freedom to worship God.’ There, in the irregularly built, and consequently picturesque abode, which we were approaching, had the stern Puritan sojourned with his family ; and within the house were still to be seen some of the identical furniture which he had brought in the days of religious persecution from his native land. Among these interesting relics were his clock and his Bible.

[1] The doctor informed me, that on a former voyage he had attended a lady similarly situated, on which occasion twins female infants being born into the world, they were baptized by the appropriate names of “ Hibernia” and “ Britannia,” being the name of the ship they were born in and her sister vessel.

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